

Luke 6:20-26 **Sooner or Later**

A quick survey of the bookshelves of Barnes and Noble or a quick search on Amazon.com will bring to view a seemingly endless number of books on how to live well. We are obsessed with the good life.

What Jesus taught was as opposite the worldview of His day as it is of ours. The leaders of the Jews found His teachings so offensive that they accused Him of being possessed by Satan and eventually had Him killed. Things have not changed much in two thousand years.

The Beatitudes provide an eloquent example of the difference between a Christian and a secular worldview. They challenge our thinking by focusing our attention on the absolutely divergent perspectives of those who follow Christ and those who do not. Again we are reminded that there is no third road.

In Luke's account of this sermon the blessings and woes are grouped together, but there is a parallel between each group. That is the first blessings is countered by the first woe, and so on. In this way, Jesus draws dramatic attention to the difference between the views of the faith, and the views of the world.

A Word about Matthew 5-7

There are differing viewpoints on whether or not this is the same sermon as recounted by Matthew in his gospel. Clearly Matthew's account is longer and more detailed, and there are things found in one narrative that are not found in the other.

Since the longer account in Matthew can be read aloud in about ten minutes, it can be concluded that even that account is not a word-for-word rendering of a particular sermon. It can also be concluded by reading other accounts of Jesus' teaching that He spoke on certain similar themes throughout His ministry. Therefore whether this is the same sermon, or a different one, is not significant since in either case the author is summarizing a longer talk for the benefit of his particular audience.

Overview

Jesus divides all people into one of two groups. Either we are blessed or cursed. The conditions are absolutely opposite. The word for blessed, *makarios*, means someone under divine favor and implies all that can be enjoyed by someone who is in a right relationship with God. The word for woe, *ouai*, means the utter calamity that befalls those who are wicked. It is as clear as the distinction between heaven and hell.

There is a difference between the way of life our Lord blesses and the way of life encouraged by the world. The world praises those Jesus pronounces woe upon. The world scorns those who consider themselves weak and needy.

These are not promises or prophecies. That is to say, Jesus is not saying that these blessings and woes are conditional in the sense that they might happen. Rather these are the divine judgments rendered by an

almighty and holy God. Much like similar sayings in the OT, these blessings and curses would be clearly understood by the audience to indicate standing before God (see Deuteronomy 27-28).

The Blessed

Jesus identifies four characteristics of the blessed. He begins by “turning His gaze toward His disciples” and saying “Blessed are you who are poor” (v. 20). While it is clear that much of the sermon is for the crowd in general, these particular sayings applied directly to those who had just been chosen. There is no reason to think, though, that others could not hear what Jesus was saying.

The historical record is clear that the early Church was filled with many who were without. The lower classes in Roman society were impressed by the respect shown in the gospel and epistles to people of the lower social and economic classes like women and slaves. The early Church was also an urban phenomenon, and it is in cities that the poor tend to be more plentiful. Still we cannot assume that Jesus is saying that the mere fact of being poor implies a state of grace. Simply because someone is poor economically is unrelated to their spiritual position in Christ.

The word used for ‘poor’ means to cringe or cower in fear, and it implies utter destitution. As we can tell from Matthew’s more explicit account, this does not refer to those who are economically poor. Rather, it refers to those who recognize their utter and total depravity. They know they are spiritually poor, with nothing to recommend themselves to God. They are, as Jesus has said, poor, blind, and oppressed (Luke 4:18).

Those who acknowledge themselves to be spiritually poor receive the “kingdom of God” (v. 20). This is not just the millennial kingdom, though it is indeed that. It is also something believers enjoy in the present. We have right standing with God now and we possess the blessings of those who are fellow-heirs with Christ. As it says in Ephesians, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3).

Jesus continued, “Blessed are you who hunger now” (v. 21). Again, we can infer from Matthew’s account that this is not physical hunger, though the disciples had suffered that most recently (Luke 6:1). This, rather, is the longing and thirsting after righteousness. It is the wanting of something that the spiritually poor know they cannot attain on their own. It is the craving that cannot be satisfied by self-righteousness.

The Psalms offer eloquent examples of this hunger:

Psalm 42:1-2

“¹As the deer pants for the water brooks,
So my soul pants for You, O God.
²My soul thirsts for God, for the living God;
When shall I come and appear before God?”

Psalm 63:1

“O God, You are my God; I shall seek You earnestly;
My soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You”

Those who hunger now, “shall be satisfied” (v. 21). God has always been sufficient for His people. The prophet Jeremiah reminded the Israelites that God had said “My people will be satisfied with My goodness” (Jeremiah 31:14). Paul told the Corinthians that Jesus had said the same thing, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Again the Psalms,
Psalm 23:1

“The LORD is my shepherd,
I shall not want.”

Psalm 107:8-9

⁸Let them give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness,
And for His wonders to the sons of men!
⁹For He has satisfied the thirsty soul,
And the hungry soul He has filled with what is good.”

Psalm 34:8, 10

⁸O taste and see that the LORD is good; How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!
¹⁰they who seek the LORD shall not be in want of any good thing.”

Jesus also said “Blessed are you who weep now” (v. 21). This refers to the natural emotional response of someone who knows they are lost and cannot save themselves. It is the cry of the desperate. It is the “the sorrow that is according to the will of God” because it “produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation” (2 Corinthians 7:10).

This weeping can be for our own sins, but it can also be for the general sins of the world that dishonor our God. Psalm 119:136,

“My eyes shed streams of water,
Because they do not keep Your law.”

This weeping was common among the great prophets, who recognized the unfaithfulness of the people of Israel.

Ezra, “Ezra rose from before the house of God and went into the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib. Although he went there, he did not eat bread nor drink water, for he was mourning over the unfaithfulness of the exiles.” (Ezra 10:6).

Daniel, “Now while I was speaking and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God in behalf of the holy mountain of my God,” (Daniel 9:20).

But Jesus affirms that those who weep “shall laugh” (v. 21). Our sorrow is only for a moment.

Psalm 30:5,

“Weeping may last for the night,
But a shout of joy comes in the morning.”

We cannot conclude that this means we are to always be in a state of sorrow. We are commanded to rejoice (Philippians 4:4; 1 Thessalonians 5:16). We know this because we understand the purpose of our difficulties now is for our edification and God's glory. "In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, ⁷so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:6-7).

The final characteristic mentioned is that "Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man" (v. 22). The first three characteristics referred to how a sinner views him or herself. This characteristic refers to how that person is seen by the world. We are reminded that our character is more important than our reputation. Our reputation is what others think of us, our character is who we know ourselves to be.

We must understand that being hated, ostracized, and scorned because we have a difficult personality or are naturally unpleasant is not the point. Indeed, one of the requirements of leadership in the church is that "he must have a good reputation with those outside the church" (1 Timothy 3:7). The key idea is that we receive that enmity from the world because we are associated with "the Son of Man" (v. 22).

Jesus Christ is the most divisive issue in the world. Jesus, Himself would make this specific point later in His ministry, "⁵¹Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division; ⁵²for from now on five members in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three. ⁵³They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law" (Luke 12:51-53).

The early believers were insulted, removed from the synagogue, and eventually martyred. Therefore we ought not to be surprised when we are treated badly for Christ's sake. It is part of our spiritual inheritance, "for to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Philippians 1:29). Believers are commanded to rejoice, "to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing" (1 Peter 4:13). This is because as Jesus says "your reward is great in heaven" (v. 23). Can any possible suffering in this life truly compare with the glories to follow in the next?

The Cursed

The first woe Jesus pronounces is on "you who are rich" (v. 24). Like poverty mentioned in the blessing, this is not material but spiritual in nature. Abraham, Job, and Joseph of Arimathea were all quite wealthy according to the standards of their time. This refers to those who are self-righteous; who believe their own deed are sufficient to merit salvation. The classic example is the Pharisee described in Luke chapter 18. He prayed, "¹¹God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get." Like that Pharisee, people who are self-righteous "are receiving your comfort in full" (v. 24). They will be given precisely what they deserve.

The admission of spiritual need was not possible to the spiritually proud. That is the antithesis of self-righteousness. The rich, young ruler of Matthew 19 is the epitome of such a person.

“¹⁶And someone came to Him and said, ‘Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?’ ¹⁷And He said to him, ‘Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.’ ¹⁸Then he said to Him, ‘Which ones?’ And Jesus said, ‘You shall not commit murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; ¹⁹Honor your father and mother; and You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ²⁰The young man said to Him, ‘All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?’ ²¹Jesus said to him, ‘If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.’ ²²But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property.”

The second woe is on those “who are well fed now” (v. 25). Again this refers to being satisfied with ourselves. These are people who think they have no needs, who are satisfied with the delights of this world. Earthly pleasure are sufficient, and are the things after which such people strive. Like the self-righteous, they will only recognize their depravity when it is too late and they shall spend eternity hungry.

The third woe is pronounced on those “who laugh now” (v. 25). The word means to rejoice, and is contrast to their curse which is that they “will mourn and weep” (v. 26). They do not recognize their sinful condition. They mock and scorn and scoff at believers. The point again is that satisfaction with this world will be empty when it is seen in distinction to the true contentment and joy that only salvation provides.

The final woe is “when all men speak well of you” (v. 26). As Jesus had shown previously, being blessed means being out-of-step with this world. Likewise, being popular with the world is a sign of being out-of-step with God. Again, this is not a matter of personality, but rather people who are self-righteous, satisfied, and content with this world will find others who are like them.

This has been true throughout history. Jesus reminds His listeners that “their fathers used to treat the false prophets in the same way.” (v. 26). Think of Absalom, “²Absalom used to rise early and stand beside the way to the gate; and when any man had a suit to come to the king for judgment, Absalom would call to him and say, ‘From what city are you?’ And he would say, ‘Your servant is from one of the tribes of Israel.’ ³Then Absalom would say to him, ‘See, your claims are good and right, but no man listens to you on the part of the king.’ ⁴Moreover, Absalom would say, ‘Oh that one would appoint me judge in the land, then every man who has any suit or cause could come to me and I would give him justice.’ ⁵And when a man came near to prostrate himself before him, he would put out his hand and take hold of him and kiss him. ⁶In this manner Absalom dealt with all Israel who came to the king for judgment; so Absalom stole away the hearts of the men of Israel.” (2 Samuel 15:2-6).

And, this will continue into the future, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires “ (2 Timothy 4:3).

Take Aways

There are two types of people; those who are blessed and those who are cursed. Some people want the good life now, whereas others are willing to sacrifice the pleasures of this world for one that will come later. May God give us the grace to recognize who we really are so that we may rely upon Him to supply what is eternally satisfying.